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ABSTRACT

What does a student achieve and learn by the time he or she graduates from high school? How are various schools educating and evaluating students in their final year of school? Interdisciplinary senior courses at Phillips Exeter Academy encourage students to exercise their analytical, interpretative, and decision-making skills; to define their own values; and to utilize their logical and rhetorical skills. However, these courses are electives. This paper describes the programs of eight private schools, with a focus on the structure of their senior-year curricula and assessments. The paper also describes a model for modifying the senior-year curriculum, which is developed around a unifying center. Senior-year programs at the following schools are highlighted: Trinity School, Phillips Exeter Academy, Riverdale Country School, Dwight-Englewood School, and Central Park East Secondary Schools (all in New York City, New York); Crossroads School (Los Angeles, California); Peddie School (New Jersey); and Punahou School (Honolulu, Hawaii). Two figures, a glossary, and a guiding definition of portfolios are included. (LMI)

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THE SENIOR YEAR IN THE HIGH SCHOOL CURRICULUM

James N. Valhouli
Klingenstein Seminar
April 22, 1994

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This (the senior Year) will be the year in which your life begins to emerge from an amorphous past to become a shaped, centered whole with its own logic and meaning.

---The Dalton School, Course Catalog 1993-94

An Introduction to the Senior Year

Senior year. Let's look at it closely and study it in some detail; the way we might look at , study, and savor a specific room of a museum . Let's focus on it , put in high relief and see what we can discover about it, never forgetting that it is part of a larger whole, a dynamic continuum, that has many antecedents and even more consequences and ramifications that may take a lifetime to understand fully. Senior year suggests a new status and the acquisition of certain skills--academic and personal, that prepare a student for the next phase of his or her life. What do schools do to graduate students who not only have the necessary skills to enter another sphere of learning but to enter the human community as sensate, caring and responsible human beings? How can the senior year be structured to provide a challenging conclusion to one's high school education, but also provide a sound preparation for and a meaningful transition into one's future life? How are schools dealing with this crucial year? How might they deal with it in the future in light of changing personal needs and new social conditions and in light of programs that are breaking new ground and creating new directions? Let's begin to look at what's in that room called the senior year.

Let's start with graduation and work backwards. After the commencement speeches and the ceremonial celebrations and after the balloons have disappeared into the horizon, and the chairs have been put away until next year's graduation, what will remain within the student as a legacy of having been at a particular school? What will the student take with him or her in addition to that diploma and that acceptance into college? What else will the student carry with him and her that is a concscious and concrete result of his or her high school education? What ways do we have of checking that what happened during high school and during the senior year will have some deep, lasting benefits? Final examinations and acceptance into college provide proof of having completed one's high school education, but what other ways are there to show, exhibit or validate the completion of one's high school education and one' personal development as a senior? What exactly does a student achieve and learn by the time he or she graduates from high school? Let's ask and think about these questions and create some additional questions. We're trying to give shape and logic to a very special room in the house of learning.

How are various schools dealing with the whole notion of educating students in the final year of high school and what are schools doing to figure our what habits, what values are worth bestowing upon young people before they move into the next sphere of their lives -- besides being able to pass final exams? How do we

"check" to see what and if any values have been learned and internalized by our students? We certainly have ways to measure completion of requirements and achievement in specific courses, but do we have any way of measuring the acquisition of knowledge and the internalization of habits in areas that go beyond the classroom? In areas that deal with the conduct of one's life in a meaningful and moral way? Do we have any way to gauge or measure if we have created autonomous, self-directed learners? Do we have any way of assessing that subtle, personal subjective area of learning that goes along with, but is usually left out of the classroom and usually manifests itself in the day-to-day life that's lived outside the classroom? Schools have a curricular program and an extra-curricular program. If we look at the senior year in some detail, we discover a series of alternative, multi-faceted courses that combine structured work with practical experiences and creative, independent, "advanced" efforts that extend and expand the boundaries of the traditional classroom. Let's look at this more expansive, more flexible way of learning and teaching as a **meta-curriculum**. It is not separate from the existing curriculum, but it does things that the traditional curriculum cannot do because it seeks to create new areas and new ways of learning. How does a meaningful **meta-curriculum** come into being? What can it do for and with the rest of the curriculum? How can it better serve our students, our teachers, our schools and our society?

What prompted these questions and some broader concerns which might have implications for all of us in education in both the private and public sector is a simple discovery that I made while studying my school's Courses of Instruction (Phillips Exeter Academy). We require all Freshmen (we call them "Juniors") to enroll in a fall-term course called **Junior Studies**. Taught by members of various departments, the course stresses essential skills of communication: observing, listening, drawing, reading, speaking , and writing. Students do a fair amount of writing and get an introduction to the computer and general research methods. As the course description indicates: "The aim of Junior Studies is to give students skills and academic attitudes that will help them in every area of study before graduation and beyond." The course also tries to approach a relevant and controversial topic in an interdisciplinary manner. Now, if you quickly jump ahead to the senior year within this same catalog you will find a listing of courses under **Senior Studies**. These courses are interdisciplinary in nature and they encourage students to make connections across disciplinary lines and to utilize skills they have developed in different disciplines in their previous years of study. Students develop skills in note-taking, longer examinations and making formal oral presentations. The aim here is to focus on broader issues and problems that students may encounter in college and thereafter. It is here that they can exercise their analytical, interpretative and decision-making skills and define their own values as they examine subjects like: Medieval or Renaissance Studies, The Black Experience in White America, The Environment, The World Seen Through a Daily Newspaper and Contemporary Europe, Asia or Africa. The courses are broader in their scope than regular courses and they encourage students to think for themselves, to take a personal stand on an issue and to argue a position with logic , conviction, clarity and passion--and we like to add, GOODNESS. It is here that students exercise their rhetorical skills and their ability to conduct both inductive and deductive reasoning. They are

encouraged to investigate a variety of issues and to draw their own conclusions. Most schools have a course like this in the senior year or at least allow for the creation of a course like this through independent or advanced study.

What interests me about these courses, is not so much their content, and pedagogical aims as it is the fact that they are elective courses. Seniors are not required to take one of these courses. About 25-30% of the senior class will normally enroll in one of these courses. Whereas all "Juniors" are required to take an introductory course that is deemed essential for their personal development future academic success, seniors are not required to take a corresponding course that might be useful as they prepare to enter the next phase of their lives and education.

Why is that? Is this the result of Faculty peevishness and and an unwillingness to establish some type of integrated learning experience or is it the result of not being able to find any unifying elements among the disciplines or among the Faculty at this level of the academic program? Some faculty would argue that since we provide various learning opportunities like Senior Projects, Independent Study and Internship, as well as travel and study abroad for one term that's sufficient. To coordinate all these activities is just about impossible. This is certainly true, but what concerns me is that students do some meaningful and challenging things, but they never share what they have learned with their friends or the community. Some might give a recital, or share a meditation of show their artistic work, but many others--perhaps most of the seniors will have graduated without having shared the best of their work. They leave with a diploma in one hand. Can't they leave with a portfolio in the other hand?

As I observe students preparing for their senior year exodus, I begin to wonder about how they will deal with the myriad of learning and living experiences that they have had up to that point. Do we do enough to help them to synthesize, to collect their thoughts and to discover some underlying reason in their lives? Do we do anything to promote quiet, sustained reflection---the sort of reflection that you bring into that favorite room of your favorite museum? Where and when does it happen? Is it impossible to require a specific course for all seniors because of the varied needs and concerns of this group of students at this particular point in their lives? Should students simply be allowed to complete the normal sequence of courses or perhaps get into Advanced Placement courses or devise Independent courses that allow them to focus on a particular topic or area of interest and leave it at that? Is our task to simply help students get into college where thy might pursue independent or interdisciplinary study on their own? Are we the masons who only build the foundation upon which the subsequent building will take place? Is our task simply one of preparation for the real development to take place sometime in the future? Should this be the year where we allow more flexibility or should this be the year when we try to help students synthesize their learning and bring to some type of closure that year's learning, the previous four years of learning or the completion of a longer learning process that has been twelve years in the making? How important is it for seniors to have a shared learning experience? How important is it for them to experience some type of culminating course that

integrates a student's knowledge and experience? Can that be structured in some way outside of traditional final examinations? Can we established a set of competencies, skills, attitudes or habits that all seniors need to know before they can embark on their higher education or before they might begin their transition into adulthood? Can something happen here that is both an end and a beginning? A culmination as well as an acknowledgment that much, much more is to come but what has been learned will be indispensable to the learning and living and creating ahead? Is there a particular course or learning experience that might challenge students, entice them to stay involved and give them an opportunity to feel that they have had some part in designing and evaluating the final part--or some part of their final year of high school? Have we exhausted all the possibilities for this year of learning or are we just beginning to understand what we can do with this seminal year?

A Sampling of Senior Year Programs

Coaxed by my increasing perplexity at the inconsistencies, contradictions, and loose ends at my own school, I was curious about how other schools defined their senior year and what problems they encountered in trying to deal with the personal, the institutional and broader pedagogical concerns and problems of this year. I visited 10 schools in the Manhattan area, examined the program of studies in a total of 20 schools and examined various types of schools to see what I could discover about the aims, the concerns, the problems and the mysteries of the senior year and how to deal with these concerns within our respective frameworks and, in my own case, what I could bring back to Exeter to make our own program more vital, more meaningful and more connected to that informational highway that is running through our schools, around our societies and circumventing our rapidly changing and shrinking world. What I have found has been truly inspiring and reassuring and, in many cases, very useful. I have compiled 10 examples of senior year programs so as to provide a sampling of the many new ways that schools have devised to give salience and real value to this crucial year for both student and teacher. Many of these programs have evolved over several years and are the result of intense planning. Some of them are still works in progress and are still undergoing changes that reflect the needs sand the adaptations of the teachers and the students in the programs. My aim here is not to present the one senior year program that will work for all schools. Instead, I would like to make colleagues at my school and other schools aware of what is going on in the senior year at other schools to stimulate thinking about the make-up and the goals of each school's own senior program so as to get a better understanding of that program and to see how it relates to other programs that are experimenting with new methods or are trying to teach particular skills or values--in new ways. A senior year program, the cap-stone learning experience in each school grows out of the many complex forces and elements and aspirations that define each school. The senior year needs to reflect and embody and be as unique as the mission that each individual school embraces as its heart and soul. For that reason, whatever program I have included here is a sample or a possibility of what *might* be done and *how* it might be done and not prescribed as what *should* be done. A senior program, like any meaningful program must grow out of the values, and the ethos that defines the culture of a specific school community.

With that in mind, let's look at some existing programs to see how varied, unique and imaginative schools and teachers can be when it comes to dealing with the senior year. Sensing for many years that seniors were often distracted and unfocused after their acceptance letters to college, usually the first two weeks in April, Trinity School (New York City) decided to allow seniors to complete their normal course work at Spring Break. When Seniors return to school after their Spring Vacation, they concentrate on AP examinations and enroll in one or two Senior Seminars that they take in place of their regular courses for the second half of the spring term, until graduation. Students meet in classes of about 10 students to discuss a topic of choice that may include: Hatha and Raja Yoga, a specific play or novel, Improvisation, Puppetry, Adventures in Creative Writing, Dada and Surrealism Through Words and Pictures, The Meaning of Sports, Bioethics , an intense course in Virgil for students who want to continue their advanced work in Latin. The courses are intended to provide more latitude and more time for personal involvement and personal reflection. These courses are also intended to be more informal and more fun. Given the intensity of the year at a school like Trinity, offering a series of looser, interdisciplinary courses certainly makes good sense. Students certainly approach them with a different attitude and see them as an opportunity to pursue a personal interest, rather than a formal course of study. Any casual observer might raise some valid questions about changing gears for a half-term, but for any teacher who has taught seniors in the spring, there is some value to loosening the boundaries and giving students that extra time to be with one another and to prepare themselves for both the pain of separation and the excitement of starting another adventure.

Riverdale Country School requires all seniors to take a year- long , interdisciplinary course called **Integrated Liberal Studies(ILS)**. The course surveys the cultural history of the West from the perspectives of four disciplines: literature, philosophy, the history of science, and the history of music and art. To quote the catalog description: "Beginning with the Greeks and ending with the 20th century the course focuses on changing worldviews, the stated or unstated assumptions that determine the meaning of life for a person born into a particular culture." Students meet four teachers in the course of a week. The course makes use of lectures, movies, slide presentations,musical recitals, critical papers which focus on cross-disciplinary topics and concludes with an individual oral exam in June. The course is intense and demanding and has a" tight" syllabus. It has to be tight. Students use a reader that has been created by the Riverdale faculty and that is about 350 pages long. For any one familiar with Columbia's Freshman Core Course, this is a slightly modified version of the same approach with appropriate modifications for the age group. The course is intended to give students a broad historical perspective and an appreciation of the evolution of western thought and western values. It is also intended to help students reason more clearly, to write with ease and confidence and to speak with clarity and logic. The shared experience of a whole class in one course for a year, culminating in an exhibition of learning through an oral exam provides a sense of structure and unity that not many schools can create through their curriculum. While students may show some concern about entering the course, they usually indicate when in college that this has been one of the most useful--if not the most useful course that they had because they learned to think and write clearly. Concerns for a course of this type? What

selections go into a core course? What if students cannot keep up with the rigor of a tight schedule and the demands of an extensive and sophisticated reading list? History teachers and teachers who feel impelled to cover pre-established assignments within a prescribed time period can imagine the strain and the tension of maintaining a demanding pace like this for a whole year. Maintaining continuity in the team teaching a course like this and creating time for collaboration might also pose some problems. A course like this take 3-5 years to create and put into place. It takes a great deal of work and collaboration. If it has teachers who believe in it, they will find a way to make it work. If students believe in it and see it as truly useful, then a school will find ways to insure its perpetuation.

As we consider the merits of a 6-week course as compared to a 9-month course, let's examine the two-year sequence that constitutes the Senior Institute at Central Park East Secondary School; that's the school that Debbie Meier has made into a model for the Coalition of Essential Schools and hopefully for a model for future public schools in American cities that may be structured and run like smaller, independent schools with no more than 450 students and a teacher/student ratio of 1/14. The Senior Year does not exist as a separate unit at CPESS. It is subsumed within and integrated with the junior year to create a two-year learning sequence called the Senior Institute. It is during these two years that students exercise and demonstrate their ability to fulfill the primary mission of the school, which is to "use their minds well." The school seeks to help students to use their minds well by helping them to refine five habits of mind that they exercise in all their courses, internships and interactions with one another. These are: (1) **Perspective**: What are you looking at and why? (2) **Evidence**: Whose evidence are you using and why? (3) **Connections**: What Connections can you make? (4) **Relevance**: In what way is this field or question relevant? (5) **Supposition**: Supposing this were true, then what would follow? Students become increasingly proficient in these habits even though they never take any final examinations. Students confront and are confronted by these questions daily and throughout their two years at the Senior Institute. In order to graduate, students must complete 14 portfolios. They are given an oral examination on 7 of these, 4 of which are in academic areas like English, Mathematics, Science and Language. The oral examination committee, which the student must select and convene, consists of the Advisor, another Faculty member, a parent, a younger student friend and the Coordinator of the Oral Committee. Portfolios provide various types of work and allow the student to select and compile work that is relevant and meaningful to the student. The student has some say in exhibiting his or her "best work." In order to graduate, a student has to demonstrate proficiency in the five habits of mind and in the prescribed portfolio areas. How is this working? The students at CPESS are not privileged students. They are New York City school students; they are East Harlem youngsters. They have not been screened or specially selected. Less than 3% of the students drop out over 4 years; 92% will go on to college. The lessons learned at CPESS go far beyond mastering five academic habits of mind; they have become proficient in believing and actually living a more useful and productive life. They have prepared themselves for the next phase of their life and thereafter by creating and learning from their portfolios of proven knowledge. Whatever students learn they put into practice and whatever they practice or experience they transform into the knowledge that will fill their various portfolios. Learning is an on-going activity

that is combined with and reinforced by practice and experience. Internships play a vital role in the Senior Institute and help students to see the direct application of their education. There is a sense of commitment, a clarity of purpose and an openness about learning at CPESS that makes the whole educational enterprise quite exhilarating here, even for a visitor sitting in on one class. I have included a brief description of the portfolio method at CPESS in my Appendix, but if you want to get a more detailed description of this method of assessment and see samples in public schools through the country that could easily be adopted by and adapted to independent schools, look at Authentic Assessment in Practice: A Collection of Portfolios, Performance Tasks, Exhibitions, and Documentation, which has been compiled and published by NCREST (National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching).

Dwight-Englewood School's Senior Focus Program is an elective course that combines elements of the programs that have been cited so far. While it has undergone numerous changes and continues to evolve to become a more integral part of the senior year program and upper school program in general, it has defined a philosophy for itself which might provide a point of reference and a point for discussion for other schools. Here is the program's philosophical framework. With a little liberty and some stretch of the imagination, we could use the following principles as the very core of the meta-curriculum that might be part of the senior year in any school:

- Seniors should reflect upon the meaning of their education.
- Seniors should experience the excitement of a personal discovery of an academic interest in a way that gives them control over their own learning.
- Seniors should gain practice in framing a broad question, narrowing it, and answering it independently.
- Seniors should experience incremental steps towards independence.
- Seniors should work collaboratively, receiving group support for their individual projects.
- Seniors should make contacts beyond the school, and find access to resources in the broadest sense.
- Seniors should demonstrate their competency in a variety of ways.

The list of enviable "shoulds" is followed by a detailed timetable that leads students from searching for a topic to finally presenting the topic before a panel in the Spring Term. The program has two written assignments which might give you a better idea of its aims and format. In the Fall Term, students compile a culminating activity, "Ways of Seeing Education," a reflective piece in which students write about some aspect of education, based on recollections of their own education, observations of schools, and reading. In the Spring Term, they compile a portfolio that summarizes the year's work and prepare for a one-hour presentation to a panel

of five evaluators. The program is imbued with the spirit of trust and the hope that the student who chooses this course of study will exercise the initiative and independence that are essential and beneficial to a lifetime of inquiry, reflection and meaningful action. About 30% of the seniors selected this option the last two years. Sharing work like this with the community is bound to have a positive effect on the entire community, as well as on the individual student who has completed this task.

Just how far one can go in trying to structure an experience that can induce one to turn within or to look at the world with keener eyes and sharper senses, really depends on the impulse, the convictions and the spirit that permeates a specific school community. At the Crossroads School in California, seniors go on a 5-day retreat where they work together and then meet daily in a Council that is modelled after Native American tribal councils. The retreat culminates with a group of students , usually about 15, who gather in a tent and experience a collective "sweat." They have been prepared for this and they talk about this before and after the experience. For many, the retreat marks a real turning point in their high school education and in their lives. They are encouraged and guided into ways of talking about the "mysteries" if being who they are and how they might begin to get to know others and the world around them. The program is intended to allow students to talk about concerns and problems and aspirations and fears that they can not normally share in other areas of their schooling. The program, which is staffed and coordinated by the Human Development Department has a detailed sourcebook that explains the nature of the program and also provides a detailed syllabus and guidelines for teachers. It is a spirited and spiritual resource for anyone interested in alternative ways to reach the inner person within the student. As the "Introduction to the 12th Grade Program" states: "We invite students and family to recognize and honor the change that takes place, *consciously* rather than *unconsciously*...We begin by honoring and remembering childhood, and move towards the particular good-byes students will face, as they move away from parents, sibling, friends, and the familiar surroundings of home." To fully appreciate how this program might touch even the most cautious or most cynical of students, watch the video that the school has made about the Senior Retreat. It will astound and amaze you. The words that the students share with us come from the heart describe a meaningful journey into the core of their being. Isn't that journey special enough for all seniors to experience before they leave our schools? Why can't we all do something to insure that all our graduates leave us with that sense of wholeness and that sense of worth that comes when and after you have touched that center of yourself and found that special voice that says: " This is who I am." Crossroads Schools has actually devised a program to make this a *conscious*, rather than an *unconscious* part of its institutional mission and educational program.

New Directions for Future Senior Year Programs

If we could stop our teaching as usual at this very moment and started to plan a new senior year program, what might it look like? What would we put into it? How would we design it? How would we implement it? How would we assess it? What implications would this design have for the rest of the program? Peddie

School(New Jersey) is in such a heady and, lets hope, enviable position. Using a small portion of its recent $100 million gift from philanthropist and alumnus Walter H, Annenberg, the school is funding a five-year academic experiment known as the Principio Project. The pilot project, which will be separate from but parallel to the traditional Peddie curriculum, will include thirty sophomores in the first year, with another thirty added in each of the following two years. Students will return to the traditional program for their senior year. The project provides an interdisciplinary approach to learning that involves teams of teachers, restructured class time, a longer school year, use of student exhibitions and demonstrations and the integration of advanced computer technology. Students will spend extensive time out of the classroom, visit American sites on a biking tour and spend three weeks in Spain studying its culture, language and history.

During the senior year students return to the Peddie curriculum, but they will enroll in a Senior Seminar that will provide the basis for the final Exhibition of Skills and Knowledge. To quote from the Project's prospectus: "Drawing on their academic experience in different areas of study, and using a variety of styles of analysis and expression, students working in pairs will identify an important modern problem or issue, and then, from a variety of perspectives, analyze the problem, its context, and the variety of forms in which it appears, project a number of possible outcomes based on their research, and then choose and justify an optimum response. Students present their work to their peers for discussion during the winter and spring term meetings of the Senior Seminar." In addition, seniors will complete their three-year long "Personal Challenge" in which they must demonstrate a sustained, intensive effort to achieve a personally established and significant academic, personal or physical goal. They will present a log of their efforts and assess their own challenges, efforts, and outcomes.

How realistic is a course of this type? How practical is it? What will it achieve that a more traditional approach could not do as well? We need to keep asking questions like these about our own programs as we see how programs like the Principio Project affect and effect students at Peddie and Peddie itself. Its exciting to think about extending the classroom into the real roadways and into other cultures, but how do we coordinate and control all that? I force myself to pose pragmatic questions like these with every proposal, but a voice inside of me tells me that pragmatism has not done a very good job structuring and restructuring our schools, so we better try something new. To innovate is to reconsider how we might do things differently. The important thing is to keep trying to find new ways to teach the things that matter.

Punahou School in Honolulu stands at the threshold of a dramatic curricular transformation in a long history of institutional change. Located in the multiculturally rich crossroads of the Pacific, the school,the largest independent school in America with 3,700 students and the oldest preparatory school west of the Rocky Mountains, is presently reviewing and considering changing its graduation requirements to reflect the changing needs of its students and the changing make-up of our world. Since the multicultural make-up of Hawaii reflects much of what our own world and schools might look like in the future it might be useful to look at the proposal being considered at Punahou. At the center of the considered changes

are the following **"Basic Underlying Premises:"**

1. That we still value the subjects/content areas that we presently require, such as Biology, literature, music,math, etc.

2. That the study and presentation of these content areas are no longer restricted to traditional labels such as English, Art, Science, etc. and therefore, we need to broaden the labels to allow interdisciplinary or connected experiences for the students.

3. *That there are, in addition to traditional content areas, ways of knowing and learning that we feel are important enough to become requirements for the students.* (Italics mine)

4. That the ability to make well informed choices is one we wish our students to master, that we, as teachers and counselors, need to help them make choices rather than choose for them.

5. That a stronger curriculum and learning environment will result from increased faculty communication and professional interaction.

As a way to achieve its mission, Punahou is considering eliminating traditional division of courses into departments and creating, in their place, **groups** of courses. During the last two years, students would take 6.5 credits out of a minimum of 10 credits from five groups of courses. Faculty would organize themselves around groups that reflected or embodied their area of interest. The groups are designated as follows:

Group I
Courses which examine people and their institutions, which demonstrate the diversity of cultures and beliefs, and which employ the techniques of historical, social, literary, and artistic analysis.

Group II
Courses concerned with the process of discovery of the order and connectedness in the natural world. Students learn to formulate questions about space, matter, the earth and the nature of life, and to apply mathematical skills, technological tools, the techniques of experimentation, interpretation of data, problem solving and deductive reasoning in answering those questions and generating news ones.

Group III
Courses which encourage spiritual growth and emphasize the development and practice of personal principles of conduct based on a value system which includes social responsibility. Students will: participate in active community service; examine and appreciate diverse systems of belief; analyze contemporary issues as they relate to values; thoughtfully refine their own code of ethics; and reflect on how their value system is manifested in their own behavior in daily life.

Group IV
Courses in which students learn by doing and, as a result, are expected and encouraged to perform tasks of progressive complexity. The active participation that is an integral part of this process empowers students to go beyond basic subject mastery and use their communicative and/or aesthetic skills in increasingly complex and creative ways.

Group V
Courses which approach learning by encouraging students to: think about open-ended questions; to classify, analyze, predict, create, form hypotheses; to formulate understanding before they are exposed to understanding of the experts, including the teacher; to synthesize, construct relationships, construct connections, and create metaphors. Teaching methods will focus on using thoughtful, open-ended questions and on encouraging students in experiences which might engender contradictions to their initial hypothesis.

Add to this proposed *re-vision* of the Graduation Requirements Punahou School's Wo International Center and you have an exciting, concrete and viable means of helping students to see how an inter-disciplinary mode of learning and a **meta-curricular** perspective on the world is indispensable in our multi-faceted, poly-glot world. Multiculturalsism has been part of the Hawaiian experience for a long time. Its schools have had to accept and work with diverse groups far longer than mainland America. Our world is truly international. We need to stop looking at the world with the eyes of *mono-seers* and we need to stop talking about it as *mono-linguists*. To paraphrase Maxine Greene of Teachers College, we need to see the world with multiple lenses and we need to speak as *multi-linguists*. The world will exact a heavy demand on our intellectual capacity, on our credibility, our perception and our values in the years ahead. For that reason, we have to embrace and teach pluralism in all stages of our education- -- and especially in the senior year.

Schools like Punahou and programs like those cited earlier are simply trying to make institutional changes and curricular changes that reflect the new and evolving makeup of the world around us. We're all caught within a network of interconnected relationships. As the world forces the individual self to create new ways of seeing and feeling, the self has to be educated and learn to educate itself to handle these new demands and become adaptable to constant and radical changes in mind and conduct. New experiences should force us to look at the world with new eyes. Those startled eyes should help us to see new ways of knowing, learning, teaching and creating senior year courses that matter.

Concluding Thoughts

American education, especially at the high school level, is in a frightful state. It is confused, beleaguered, and unsure of itself. It is encountering problems and concerns that are baffling and almost insurmountable. Our independent schools may have escaped the direct impact of the worst problems that afflict the young in our society, but when we look at ourselves nationally and internationally, we're not doing a very good job of educating and graduating students who care about those

humane values that used to be taught in families, in religious institutions , and in habitats that were once communities. A lot seems to be excluded from the lives of young people who are coming into ours schools. The statistics that any one can turn to automatically have become the cliches of a degenerate and decaying mode of life; teen pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, spiraling drop-out rates , illiteracy, labor shortages, declining skills in all areas of life, hunger, decaying cities and a sense in a growing number of young people that there is no escaping the downward spiral of things in their lives. There is much in our society that is downright hopeless. We are a culture that is threatened by our own national inadequacies, our own lack of a unified purpose. Our growing mediocrity and increasing hopelessness might become our worst and most devastating enemies.

Does one year in the curriculum of one's high school education stop all that? Can it even attempt to resist the negative flow of things? In and of itself, it can't do very much. In and by myself I , or you , or the teacher in the nearby private, parochial, independent, technical or public school cannot do very much either. But we can all do something if we select a strategic point or position from which we can view the territory, the landscape, the domain that makes up our respective schools. It is from that strategic position that we can look at what is happening and see what line of action we might take.

The senior year is such a strategic position. It is an end point and a point of demarcation. It holds a distinct position in the high school curriculum because so much happens during that year. In an educational life that may last 12, 16 , 20 or more years--perhaps a lifetime, it is a pivotal year. It is here that one begins to look forward and backward with equal intensity and with equal awe at what has been and what might be. Ambivalence and irony and ambiguity are not reserved solely for seniors, but it is usually during this period that one begins to see life as a continuum-- a complex and puzzling continuum that almost seems beyond comprehension. Here is when decisions become unavoidable and the consequences of our choices are painfully inescapable. But it is also here that we sense that we too may go forward in time and put our imprint on the world. It is here that our consciousness begins to nudge forward or blossom and sometimes even explode into recognition, action or some type of resolution that might influence the rest of our lives. This is where we begin our lifelong journey into the unknown areas of the self and the world at large. I think this is when be begin to think about and even decide that we might make a difference in life. It is here that we normally begin asking those vital , imperative questions that we will return to the rest of our lives . It is also here that we begin to learn those habits of the mind and the heart that might help us to become the individuals that we want to become in the life that we create for ourselves. The turmoil of the year might provide the very energy that we can direct into some powerful learning.

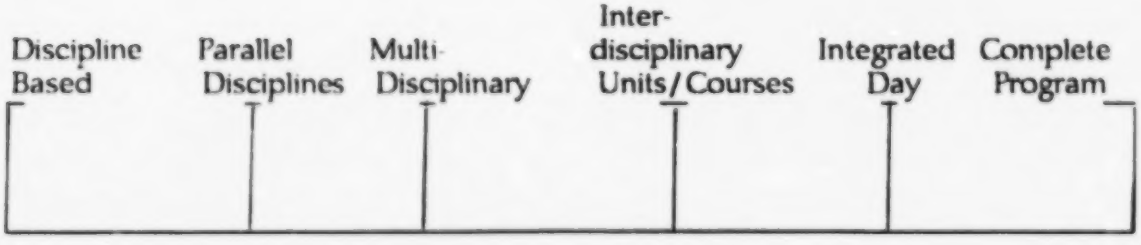
We're all doing something that is special and unique in our schools. In one way or another, we're all probably doing something very special in our senior year as well. I'm not sure in 1994 who has the right answer. I know there is no right formula, but there might be a better and more meaningful way to handle that year. If we think about how to make that a better year, then I think we'll begin to

make every other year equally meaningful. The lines connecting the four years of one's high school education should be open and in touch with one another. If we can create a more dynamic and a more vibrant connection within the high school curriculum, can't we extend that line upward and downward so that we know what we're all doing from K to 12 to 16 to 20 and so on? If no one can make and maintain these connections, isn't it our mission to provide a learning map or a mode of seeing which can help people to integrate the various skills and attitudes that are outlined in Punahou's "graduation guidelines?"

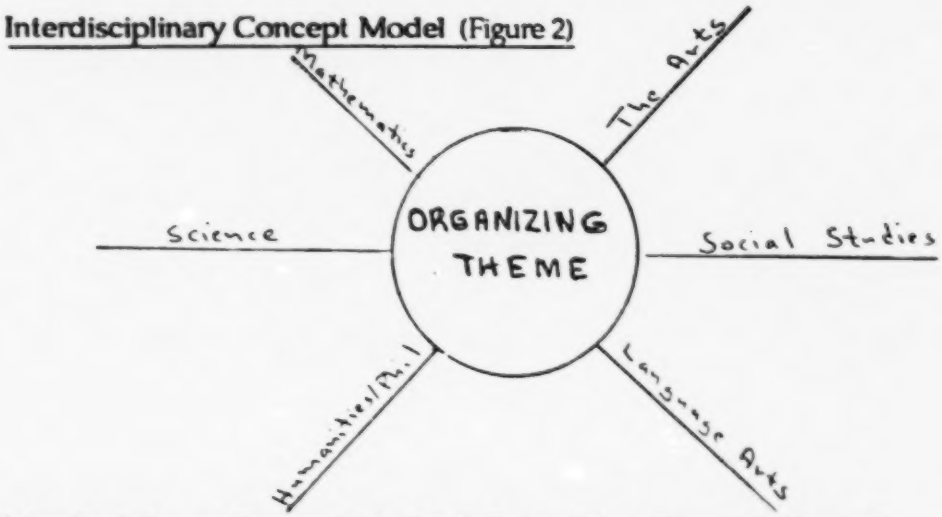
Let me share a conception and a hope with you which goes back to my opening. I think that we can establish a connecting line between **Junior Studies** and **Senior Studies**. We can do that if we can continue, or begin to talk to one another in a language that goes beyond the confining idioms of our respective disciplines and personal interests. We need to talk between departments and between buildings and between constituencies and between different institutional roles and areas of expertise. We need to bridge the divisions or chasms that have been created by stultifying tradition, indifference and by lazy, biased, unimaginative thinking.

I don't have that magical paradigmatic schema that I can pass on to my colleagues and say: "Here it is; here is the blueprint for *your* senior year and for *my* senior year." There is no such solution. There is, however, a certain attitude and a certain process that we might all follow and coach ourselves to understand and exercise in our respective schools. It is through this process that we might find the senior program that might be appropriate for and beneficial to our respective schools. As a way to visualize how we might begin to think about this process of change and how we might modify the senior year, it might be helpful to look at two diagrams that Heidi Jacobs includes in her useful and illuminating book, Interdisciplinary Curriculum: Design and Implementation. Her approach would be useful in creating a single senior year course or in integrating a whole curriculum. She provides the conceptual map; we need to decide on a route and create a destination that is appropriate to and valid for our schools:

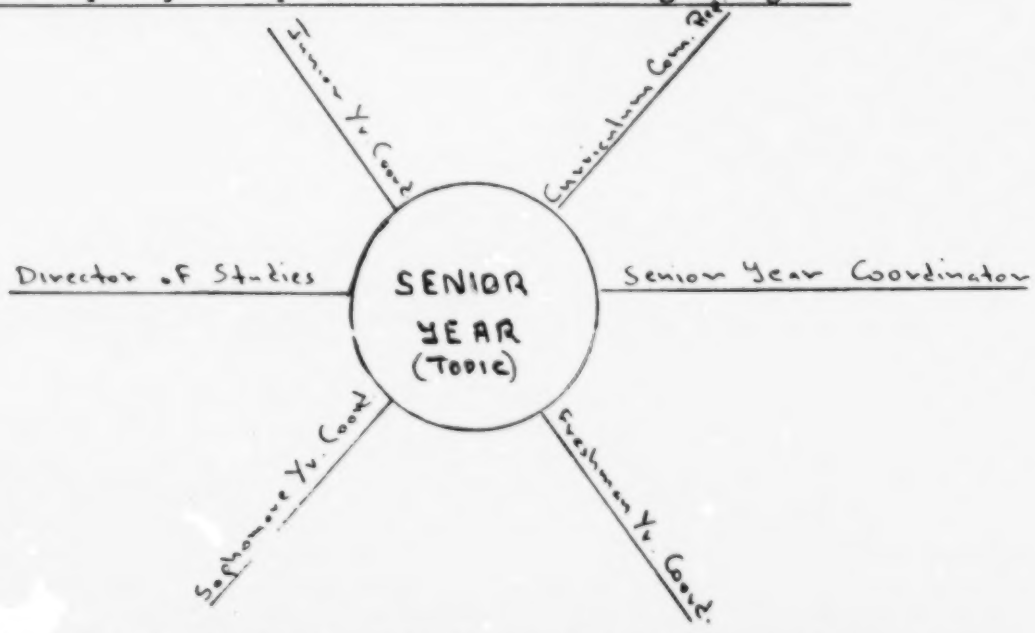
Continuum of Options for Content Design (Figure 1)



Interdisciplinary Concept Model (Figure 2)



Interdisciplinary Concept Model: A Senior Year Program (Figure 3)



The hub of the wheel that contains the **organizing center** can be any topic or concern that is of interest to a particular school or group of teachers. This might also apply to a department, a faculty, a community, a whole culture. It might also be a topic that can identify the focus of a course or a program. What has happened to too many of us and to too many schools and institutions and professions is that they have gotten on one of those lines leading outward and they have never gotten back to the center or connected with any other lines of thought. In academic circles, we call that departmentalization; in other circles, we call it isolation. It is a frightening condition no matter what you call it. As the world fragments geographically and politically around us, we have to find ways to re-establish some type of conceptual unity in the essentials around us. A meaningful senior year course can provide a unifying center because so many things lead into it and so many things grow out of it. It is crucial that something substantial, something

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meaningful happen during this year. If we can define and give shape to this inner sphere (lets call it the senior sphere) then we can give more meaning and purpose to one's broader sphere, which is one's education as a whole. Who knows, If we're lucky enough, we might reach a few more students and actually make a difference in their lives and inspire them enough so that they too will want to make a difference--a positive difference in the future.

I have a recurring fantasy which I would like to share here as a way to conclude this paper. I imagine all of us greeting a senior class or a single senior in September and saying something like : "By the time you graduate, you *really* will emerge as a more shaped and a more centered person with a real sense of purpose--and a sense of logic." Well, I'm not sure that I could say something as formal and imperious as that and keep a straight face, but I would say something like that and then work like Sisyphus to make a difference on a daily basis and throughout the year, especially when it came to working with and counselling seniors as they complete their final year and as they prepare for the following year.

I think I could muster the courage to say this to a senior or teach with this notion in mind if I too committed myself to living out the spirit of becoming once again, less amorphous and more centered and more directed. If we can commit ourselves to the principle and spirit of own-going growth and perpetual transformation in the way we view, interpret and act in the world, then I think that we can continue to create dynamic and evolving senior courses that will change with our students, with our world and with our own discoveries. To establish a new senior year program or to renew a course in the senior year is a way to to renew and strengthen the entire curriculum that we learn and live throughout our lifetime.

The Senior Year In The Curriculum
A Glossary of Relevant Courses

1. Senior Advanced Work:
A student pursues advanced work on a one-to-one basis or in a small group in a designated discipline with the guidance of a teacher.

2. Senior Independent Study or Project:
A student designs a course and submits a proposal to a department or committee and normally takes that course in place of another required course.

3. Senior Seminar:
Usually an interdisciplinary course for a selected number of students that its intended to allow for more detailed exploration of a particular topic and that might help a student to synthesize earlier work.

4. Senior Internship:
A student works in the field with an alumnus or alumna or in a program coordinated by a particular school and gets first hand experience in a filed of interest. Look at the way Friends Seminary, Phillips Exeter and Central Park East structure this learning experience.

5. Senior Service:
Students do voluntary community service of about 40-50 hours as part of a graduation requirement . Read the Mission Statement of Friends Seminary and then look at its Service program to see how closely the two are connected.

6. College Study:
Students may enroll in a college-level course where appropriate and where possible and fulfill a graduation requirement through this course.

7. Senior Council, Senior Trip or Senior Retreat:
This is normal activity for urban schools that need to get away and allow students to experience a different setting as a way of getting to know one another, themselves and their respective school community.

8. Senior Tutor/Teacher, Advisor, Proctor, Listener:
Students get involved in working with and helping peers as well as younger students. Their work in dormitory life can be indispensable. The same may be said for the other areas in which they can get involved with the various concerns, problems and ways of making schools more caring communities.

9. Senior Meditation:
Seniors in many of Exeter's English classes are asked to write and share a personal narrative of some personal significance . They normally share these with their English classes, but they may also share these with the Meditation that is held once a week at the school's chapel. Students are asked to reflect upon and respcnd to the meaning and value of their educational experience or to share a significant event in their lives that has touched them deeply. Since faculty and administrators also share their own personal meditations this has become a powerful and binding ritual within the Exeter community. Some of these have been published and are available through the Exeter Bookstore. I would be happy to provide samples upon request.

10. Senior Portfolio:
The Coalition of Essential Schools has popularized this type of learning and assessment. It offers some very rich opportunities for passionate learning. There are various on this model and you can find some excellent samples in the NCREST publication. They can certainly be modified and adapted to any school setting that wants its students to "learn by doing." So as to provide some understanding of what may go into a portfolio, I have included the description from the NCREST handbook on the following page.

Portfolios

Portfolios may include performance tasks and a variety of other student work samples, along with observations and evaluations of student learning from the student and peers as well as the teacher. They provide multiple sources of information about a student's development over time. One important feature of most portfolios is that the student plays a major role in developing and selecting work to include in the portfolio, particularly where the portfolio includes a student's self-selected "best work" along with versions of a piece of work over time. The active participation of the student in his/her own self-assessment process, with the teacher's (and sometimes peers') facilitation, brings a metacognitive element to this approach, helping students learn to evaluate how and what they are learning and to develop their own internal standards. Like an artist's portfolio, a portfolio for assessment purposes is a collection of a student's work that demonstrates his/her achievements, growth, and efforts in many areas or media. It provides documentation of the student's work that displays command of skills and content as well as insight into the learning process over time. As contrasted with the snapshot view of a student provided by a test, portfolios offer opportunities for longitudinal assessment. This supports a developmental view of learning and a keener understanding of each student's own path toward competence.

Both portfolios and performance-based assessments are consistent with contemporary developmental and constructivist learning theories. These assessments ask learners to actively synthesize knowledge and apply it in open-ended ways. Skills, knowledge, and reasoning are integrated rather than fragmented when a student is asked to construct his/her own performance or portfolio. The boundaries between assessment, the curriculum, and learning become more permeable while the process of learning becomes more coherent.